

Knowing your Roots: from teen to Pilgrim leader

By Mary McKenzie
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Henry Samson (sometimes referred to as Henry Sampson in historical documents) landed in Plymouth in 1620 at the age of 16 with his baby cousin, Humility Cooper (1 year old), in the custody of his aunt, Ann, and her husband, Edward Tilley.

It isn't clear why he was in the custody of his aunt and uncle. His parents, James and Martha Cooper Samson, and siblings stayed in the town in which he was born – Henlow County, Bedfordshire, England. According to "Mayflower Families in Progress," published in 1992 by the Society of Mayflower Descendants, Samson was born January 15, 1603. There are some historical texts that surmise he may have been an apprentice to Edward Tilley, who was a weaver and a separatist. Tilley went to Leiden in 1616 and it is indicated that Henry was with him when he did. Although the reasons are unknown, both the young Henry and his cousin were in the custody of their aunt and uncle.

Henry was not forgotten by his parents, though. In 1638, his father left him five pounds, according to his will.

The young Samson did not sign the Mayflower Compact when the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, as he was not an adult at the time. He and Humility would soon be virtually orphans, as both Ann and Edward died during that horrible first winter. Sampson and Humility may have been sent to live with the Winslow family, which is indicated in a 1623 Division of Land, as Humility is designated as having land adjoining Henry Samson in that record. Humility is indicated as living with the Brewster family in 1627.

Humility returned to England in her teen years and there is a record of her baptism at Holy Trinity of Minorities in London around March 17, 1638. There isn't any further information on her. But Henry Samson stayed here and became a leader for Plymouth Colony and one of the first settlers to Duxbury.

He was part of a group of Plymouth Colony men who took on the debt owed to Merchant Adventurers, a Londonbased investment company that financed the Mayflower expedition. This move allowed the colonists to divvy up land and stretch beyond the original settlement area. Samson moved here in 1627 and took over a land grant along the water, near the Winsor House. He married Anne Plummer in 1635 and had nine children with her.

Much of that land stayed in the family for several generations, but was sold about 200 years ago when descendants moved to other parts of Duxbury. Many of his descendants are in the area today.

Young orphan Sampson grew to be a community leader; he served on juries, was appointed arbiter in 1648, surveyor in 1649, was named Constable of Duxbury in 1661 and tax collector in 1667 and 1668. His nine children include Stephen, John, James, Caleb, Elizabeth, Mary, Hannah, Dorcas and the one daughter whose name is still not known but who married John Hanmore.

Henry Sampson died on Christmas Eve in 1684 in Duxbury.